Koeller Promoted to Full Professor

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by John Zakour

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Wolfram Koeller has been promoted to full professor of Plant Pathology at Cornell University

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GENEVA, NY: Wolfram Koeller has been promoted to full professor of Plant Pathology at Cornell University. Koeller specializes in the molecular aspects of plant disease control as they relate to fungicide resistance and the design of new and advanced fungicides with little or no environmental side effects."Wolfram's program is uniquely positioned in the interface between basic and applied research," said Helene Dillard, chairperson of the Department of Plant Pathology at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY, where Koller works. "In this niche, he has made many significant contributions to the field of plant pathology."

Wolfram is a native of Germany, where he grew up on a small family farm as the youngest and only post-war child. During his childhood as a farm boy, he discovered that hard farm labor and, in particular, "mechanical weed control" was hardly the destiny of choice. Torn between more or less equal interests in chemistry and biology during his high school years, he decided to focus on chemistry.

Wolfram received his B.S. and M.S. in chemistry from the Phillipps University at Marburg, one of the oldest universities in Germany. Because the jobs available for M.S. chemists back in 1976 when he completed his degree paid "lousy" salaries, Koeller decided to "bite the bullet" and pursue his Ph.D. at the same university. By then, he also had re-discovered his interest in biology and settled on a thesis project in biochemistry.

"My choices for my Ph.D. project were killing rats and tearing out their livers while they were fresh and warm, or finding out how cucumber seeds convert fat into whatever they need to germinate and grow new cucumbers," said Koeller. He chose cucumbers.

While Koeller was concentrating on cucumbers, he re-discovered his farmer genes and decided to do "something" to impact growers. He was fortunate enough to attract a highly competitive German DFG fellowship to join a U.S. research team at Washington State University in 1980 to help answer the question of how exactly fungal pathogens infect plants. He accepted an appointment at Bayer in 1982 where his charge was to build and lead a small team working on the molecular aspects of fungicide discovery and resistance. He came to the Experiment Station as an assistant professor in 1986.

Koeller is proud of his research program at the Station, where his accomplishments are nationally and internationally recognized. It is one of the few programs that integrates current problems of chemical disease control with the exploration of innovations that can be made in the future.

Koeller is also aware that any program success is a team effort. He is grateful to the many graduate students, post-doctoral associates and visiting scientists he has worked with and mentored. He is particularly grateful for the long-term support provided in his lab by research associate Diana Parker.

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